

GREATER DOWNTOWN TIF ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES

September 26, 2019

Present: Bill Kennedy, Ed Juengst, Kyle Sullivan, Jim Albridge, Peter Robinson, Cy Gregg and Karen Hatcher

Also Present: Peter Throop, Director and Laura Norton, Administrative Assistant, Office of Community Development

Chair Kennedy called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. with introductions of the Members and Staff.

Minutes: A motion was made/seconded (Juengst/Robinson) to approve the Minutes of June 21, 2018 as written with Mr. Gregg, Mr. Robinson, Mr. Albridge and Mr. Juengst in favor.

Recap of TIF Fund Balances and Forecasts:

Mr. Throop briefly reviewed the cash flow and fund balances of the Greater Downtown TIF District (GDTIFD). As he began Ms. Hatcher suggested he review the intension and locations of the TIF Districts “in a nutshell” for the new members. “I just want to make sure everyone is comfortable” she said.

With assurance from Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Kenney they were in fact comfortable with the TIF concept Mr. Throop continued with the assessed value captured (GFA Credit Union, Global Montello-All Town, improvement to the Shopping Plazas, and the expected Bridge Street Rehabilitation Center); revenues (interest income and property taxes) and expenditures (new downtown parking lot, town parks, Department of Public Works projects, administration and general supplies).

Mr. Throop had distributed a copy of the GDTIFD Plan which was adopted in 2012. He picked it up and pointed out the only change to the document was an amendment to the duration (sunset) of the District from May 31, 2022 to June 30, 2035 (*Article 10: Modification to the 2012 Greater Downtown Tax Increment Finance District Area and Plan Duration*) approved at Town Meeting, 2015.

Mr. Throop then reviewed restricted funds of \$220,000. “I am still trying to figure this out” he said. Chair Kennedy interjected “whatever it is if it were freed up it would be a significant amount of money and an impact of the balance. We need to know the nature of the restriction and if it is invested or just sitting there.” An inquiry from a Member about the restriction possibly being related to the new town parking lot at the GAR Hall (as the GDTIFD pays the bond for the lot) prompted another Member to ask about the cost of the lot in general. Mr. Bartlett briefly reviewed the cost of the required land purchases, site work and construction and noted “it came in pretty close to the 1.2 million dollars requested.” (*Article 8: GAR Hall and Adjacent Parcels Parking Lot*) approved at Town Meeting, 2015.

Mr. Robinson asked, “is that a 20-year bond?” with Mr. Bartlett replying “yes.”

Potential Future Projects:

Mr. Bartlett began with a brief review and discussion of the status of GDTIFD approved projects including sidewalk maintenance on Main Street and storm water separation in the downtown. “We have been unravelling the mystery of what pipes go where for some time now” he said.

Proposed Use of TIF funds FY 2020 and 2021:

Funds to cover Staff Cost of Administration and Project Management:

Ms. Hatcher began with a review of items that included general supplies and the offset of administration costs. (Mr. Throop explained these costs included administrative efforts by himself, Mr. Bartlett, Seth MacLean and others). “Whoever is working on TIF related projects” he said. Mr. Sullivan asked, “so is this a position?” with Mr. Throop replying, “we use the money to offset a position in my department but technically it offsets any staff’s time for projects we have taken on.” Mr. Juengst told the Members he was a member of all three TIF Districts (acting as full member or Planning Board Liaison) “and it makes sense to have all three districts contributing. This offsets 100% of the staff costs without affecting the tax rate” he said adding “and there is no burden on salaries and benefits.” Mr. Sullivan interjected “it is really more the creation of a position than the allocation.” Mr. Robinson added “I voted against it last time and I intend to do so again.” He went on to explain his belief that the allocation was not in the spirit of the TIF and that if additional staff was necessary it should come from the town budget. “Paying staff from the TIF goes against what the TIF is intended to do in my view” he said.

On Chair Kennedy’s suggestion for further deliberation:

A motion was made/seconded (Juengst/Kennedy) to make a recommendation to the EDA to approve \$10,000 of GDTIFD funds as a contribution to ongoing staff support.

Deliberation:

The Members briefly reviewed the legality of the use of funds in this manner. Mr. Bartlett reassured them both the Town’s attorney and the New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration have weighed in “and the answer to that question is that it is legal, and it is permitted” he said. Mr. Robinson again disagreed, noting the funds were meant for improvements not maintenance and staff support. He cited the example of a town road that has been in use for decades and subsequently improved. “The fact that it is located in a TIF District doesn’t mean the town stops maintaining it. It should continue to be maintained regardless, like it (the town) has been doing since day one” he said adding “that is not what the advantage of a TIF District is supposed to be.”

Ms. Hatcher interjected “I hear you and I wonder if a limited percentage of TIF funds could be used for maintenance, where a balance could be struck and considered.” “I don’t believe that is in the spirit of the ordinance” replied Mr. Robinson. Mr. Juengst noted that any improvement project that may be in competition for funds would result in the improvement winning out. Mr. Robinson maintained “it should be on a case by case basis and not just voted on each year in perpetuity.” Chair Kennedy asked, “so you would be in favor of approving it for one year?” “No, I would not be” replied Mr. Robinson adding “I don’t believe the TIF should be picking up items

that belong to the town. I think things like sidewalk maintenance and repairs in the District (which have been paid for with TIF funds) should be under town maintenance.”

Mr. Bartlett reiterated his suggestion to postpone the sidewalk work and save (invest) that money in a plan for the downtown (post bridge work). “We will have a better vision of where we are then” he said.

Mr. Sullivan asked about the potential of TIF funds being available to the downtown merchants and businesses. “That may help keep things alive while the downtown is being torn apart” he said. Mr. Throop noted he did believe the statute allows making TIF funds available to merchants. “How about using TIF funds for marketing the town?” asked Mr. Robinson. Ms. Hatcher agree noting the funds for the administrative support could be redirected to marketing. Mr. Throop replied the TIF funds were “for more infrastructure related projects” and that he would have to research the statute to answer the question. Ms. Hatcher concluded “those funds could support the infrastructure we have during the Main Street Bridge construction.”

Vote:

The motion had been made/seconded to consider the allocation of GDTIFD funds in the amount of \$10,000 for administrative support purposes in Fiscal Year 2021. The motion was denied with Mr. Juengst in favor and Mr. Robinson, Mr. Kennedy, Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Albridge against. (Mr. Gregg as an Alternate had not been seated and did not vote and Ms. Hatcher as the Board of Selectman’s Liaison also had no vote).

Continuation of Sidewalk and Stormwater Work:

Mr. Bartlett again suggested to the Members that the sidewalk and stormwater work be temporarily suspended. He told the Members “the new focus for the downtown is lower Main Street (from the bridge to the Town House). He told the Members he would like to see he funds go to the development of conceptual plans and cost estimates. He noted the money would be better spent on an engineering firm’s consultant for Main Street, Depot Square and a connection to the Riverwalk Parking Lot than putting the money to the sidewalks. “There will be changes” he said adding “there will be greater green spaces, street furniture and trees in the lower Main Street areas.”

Mr. Bartlett then addressed the “way-finding” signs for the Downtown noting “the Riverwalk signage is a start.” Ms. Hatcher reiterated that a branded look and feel for the signs was very important. Mr. Bartlett confirmed “the program is moving forward” adding “remember this will take over a year to plan the lower Main Street post-bridge corridor connections with Depot Square and Summer Street.” Mr. Gregg noted his upcoming visit to the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) regarding his request to put a “Welcome to Depot Square” sign on the roof the Bowerbird store in Depot Square with the Members agreeing it was time to start the way-finding signage *now*.

When another brief discussion about the fiscal year and budgetary process followed Ms. Hatcher asked about the \$220,000 in restricted funds. Citing no appropriation for the use of those funds in FY2020, Mr. Bartlett noted “you’re not going there no matter what.” Ms. Hatcher replied, “so essentially it is only the \$20,000 appropriated for the sidewalk program that can be used this fiscal year.” Mr. Bartlett replied, “yes and that is limited for this year” reiterating his suggestion

that the money allocated for sidewalk work be used for engineering conceptual work for lower Main Street. A brief discussion about the process and timeline followed. Mr. Bartlett concluded by suggesting that before any vote was rendered, they take a bit more time to get a better handle on the concept design and wayfinding signage and meet again in December “before the hard budget process starts in January.” “So we are not going to approve anything today” interjected Mr. Juengst with Mr. Bartlett replying “no, we will have more information in December, maybe sooner.”

Chair Kennedy reiterated “so we agree, no decisions today” with the Members in agreement. Chair Kennedy also mentioned the Peterborough Energy Committee and their potential project, specifically (electrical) charge stations in the new River Walk Parking Lot off Grove Street. A brief discussion on whether or not that project may be an appropriate use of TIF funds followed. Mr. Bartlett also mentioned grant opportunities and concluded “there are conduits in the ground waiting for a proposal .”

“Speaking of parking lots” Mr. Sullivan went on to explain the current status of the other public lot downtown. “It is messy and not well maintained” and asked, “is there any way to improve it?” “Sounds like maintenance to me” replied Ms. Hatcher with Mr. Bartlett in agreement. Mr. Juengst noted that lot was scheduled to have specific permitted parking hours and cautioned limiting parking there. “Businesses may move out without parking.” It was noted the new lot had been well received but the test of time (and winter) was yet to come.

Other Business:

Chair Kennedy noted that the Members should be thinking about an update for the GDTIFD Plan with addendums of what has happened since its adoption in 2012. “Let’s see what was actually done and make sure it is actually supported” he said. It was noted that several parking issues had been resolved over the years but in a different way than the Plan had suggested and that the Plan should be updated to show it. “This should be ongoing as projects are declared to reflect current realities” he said.

Next Meeting: TBA, early December in advance of the public hearings in January.

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Norton
Administrative Assistant